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## 4

### 'A jaghire without a crime'

#### *The East India Company and the Indian Ocean material world at Osterley, 1700–1800*

Yuthika Sharma and Pauline Davies

On Friday we went to see – oh! the palaces of palaces! and yet a palace sans crown, sans coronet – but such expense! such taste! such profusion! and yet half an acre produces all the rents that furnish such magnificence. It is a jaghire got without a crime. In short, a shop is the estate, and Osterley Park is the spot. The old house I have often seen, which was built by Thomas Gresham; but it so improved and enriched, that all the Percies and Seymours must die of envy. ...<sup>1</sup>

The words of Horace Walpole (1717–97), writer, connoisseur, antiquarian and intellectual underline the change of status of Osterley's owners resulting from their wide-ranging involvement in global maritime trade. Walpole's observations highlight the elevated status of the Child family, and their multi-generational link with East India Company (EIC) trade and shipping networks in the Indian Ocean. They were neither aristocrats nor members of the circle of newly enriched nabobs, whose acquisition of wealth contemporaries linked to corrupt practices in the colonies.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the family's rise as technocrats and their association with the corporate arm of the British Empire were fostered through a long-standing career in precious stones, prior to their rise in EIC circuits of trade and governance.

The Osterley estate contained a simple farmhouse when it was first acquired in 1562 by Sir Thomas Gresham (1519–79), financial adviser to Queen Elizabeth I.<sup>3</sup> He built a fine manor house there, and it is known that

the Queen paid 10 visits to Osterley Park. Nearly two centuries later, it was fitting that City money should fund Osterley Park's architectural and interior redesign as a classical home by Robert Adam (1728–92), one of the most important British architects working in the neoclassical style, bringing it into line with current fashion once again. Osterley Park is distinguished by its wealth of original eighteenth-century furnishings made in accordance with Adam's drawings and by the range of his evolving styles visible under one roof. It is this quintessentially English eighteenth-century style that dominates the National Trust's presentation and interpretation of the House today. The oriental objects in the House are shown as typical of the period; their use alongside the neoclassical style is a recognised norm of interior decoration at that time. But if we look beyond this to the acquisition of the wealth that enabled Adam's re-styling, a different story emerges.

In this chapter, we analyse the Childs' engagement with the EIC to consider how these growing connections with maritime trade bore a material imprint on Osterley's domestic interior. The impact of global trade on the visual culture of Osterley House illuminates the Child family's personal and professional aspirations. The decorative arts of Osterley were part of a fashion for the oriental in the eighteenth century, at a time when the category of the orient was being actively crafted in the European imagination. Rather than fixating on the 'unfamiliarity' of the orient that is often used as a modality of postcolonial writing on the East, this chapter will highlight the formative importance of maritime commerce on the perceived 'social value' of decorative arts at Osterley. It was the range of 'oriental' objects at Osterley that impressed Walpole. Among them was a book of illustrations of birds brought in from various parts of the world through EIC trade displayed alongside paintings by European masters, with the birds themselves visible in the imposing menagerie in the grounds. Walpole wrote:

Mrs Child's dressing room is full of pictures, gold filigree, china and japan. So is all the house – there are Salvators, Gaspar Poussins, and to a beautiful staircase, a ceiling by Rubens.<sup>4</sup> Not to mention a kitchen garden that costs £1400 a year, a menagerie full of birds that comes from a thousand islands which Mr. Banks has not yet discovered ...<sup>5</sup>

We query the role of such objects sourced from the East as mediators of a social identity in that they displayed a personal connection with the Childs while also broadly referencing the complex interactions

of European and Asian trade and artistic exchange. The first section of this chapter examines the career of three generations of the Child family focusing on their imbrication with the leadership and governance of the EIC. The second section provides greater context about the family's maritime operations through their commercial ventures in shipping. The final section on material goods brings together a selection of objects that embody the tangible links of the Child family with East India Company trade to highlight the role of these 'oriental' objects as markers of a desirable yet niche market for globally sourced luxury goods,<sup>6</sup> prior to their widespread appeal and dispersal as consumer goods in nineteenth-century Britain. Rather than focusing on the period of Adam's interventions in Osterley Park (and their European orientation), we focus on the arrival of furnishings and objects from the East prior to the 1760s. We suggest that it is through the acquisition of these objects – Chinese armorial porcelain, lacquerware and Indian textiles – that the Childs created a distinctive visual identity and enduring status for their family in London society. Moreover, as this study elaborates, the inflow of luxury objects may have been a result of personal choice as well as current fashion.

## Family commerce

The family's fortune was founded by Sir Francis Child (1642–1713), initially through his skill and business acumen as a goldsmith, and later by the bank he founded and his and its relationship with the EIC (see Figure 4.1). By the early eighteenth century, the Child family had successfully navigated the connected worlds of finance, global trade and politics and had amassed both wealth and influence. Of the senior partners in the renowned Child & Co. bank, two served as Lord Mayor of London,<sup>7</sup> three were knighted and at least one member of the family sat as an MP for all but one of the years from 1722–82. The family-owned bank both financed and profited from the EIC. Shares in the Company remained an important source of their wealth throughout this period. We know that the third Francis Child (1735–63) had EIC annuities worth £32,000 when he employed Robert Adam in 1760.<sup>8</sup> By the time this generation began working with Robert Adam on the designs for Osterley Park, the family had been close to the centre of the often-overlooked global networks that supported the English financial revolution for nearly 100 years (see Table 4.1).

Their connection to, and influence within, the Company was significant. For over 30 years one of the immediate family was a Director,<sup>9</sup> while two were investors in ships that carried the goods for a wide and growing

consumer market.<sup>10</sup> They thus sat, and had influence, at the centre of the political, financial and commercial world at a time when the Company was in its formative phase of growth. The family profited from these connections, both financially and as elite consumers who could access the finest luxuries, and importantly, specially commissioned goods. By the time they began working with Robert Adam on the designs for Osterley Park, the global networks that supported the English financial revolution could not but affect the choices they made.

Although his life falls outside the main date range for this study, Francis Child the Elder (1642–1713) provides the most compelling case for including Osterley Park within this project. His success was fuelled by the mutually supportive global and national networks that

**Table 4.1: The Child family as Directors of the EIC**

1630–1700	1701–1720	1721–1732
<p>Sir Francis Child the elder was a substantial stockholder in the Old East India Company with the Company account in Child &amp; Co. bank. He was appointed to the committee set up to finalize negotiations for a merger with the new Company The United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies ‘provided that it can be done on safe, just and reasonable grounds’.<sup>11</sup> And a parliamentary list of early 1700 classed him in the ‘interest’ of the Old East India Company.<sup>12</sup></p> <p>He served on the EIC Court of Directors between 1698 and 1701.</p>	<p>Sir Robert Child served on the court of Directors between 1710–12 and sat on a number of committees.</p> <p>Sir Francis the elder was also a Director 1711–12.</p> <p>Sir Robert was elected Deputy Chairman between 1714–15 after a struggle with supporters of the Bank of England candidate.</p> <p>Sir Robert was elected Chairman 1715–16<sup>13</sup> and his influence with the Treasury is apparent in the Court Minutes.<sup>14</sup></p> <p>Sir Robert was re-elected as Director in 1720.</p>	<p>Sir Francis Child the younger served as Director in the years 1721–22, 1724, 1726, 1728 and 1732.<sup>15</sup></p> <p>He was variously a member of the Warehouses, Accounts and Private Trade Committees.</p>

underpinned the growth of the City of London. He acquired Osterley Park in 1712, shortly before his death. The son of a cloth merchant, Francis Child moved to London in 1656 as an apprentice, and eventually became a Freeman of the Company of Goldsmiths in 1665.<sup>16</sup> Around this time, it is known that he went to work for Blanchard and Wheeler, one of the pioneering banker/goldsmiths who had premises in the Strand. Blanchard's widow had married William Wheeler and when in 1671 he married her daughter, he inherited their combined fortunes rapidly raising Francis Child's status in London society. Blanchard and Wheeler, and its successor business, Child & Co. survived the many pitfalls that befell other banker/goldsmiths at this time, and when he died in 1713 Sir Francis Child was a very wealthy man, with assets of £250,000 – assessed by Philip Beresford to be equivalent to £3.8 billion today.<sup>17</sup>



**Figure 4.1** Francis Child the Elder (1642–1713). Attributed to Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646–1723). Reproduced by kind permission of Christ's Hospital.

Child & Co. was a favourite bank for the landed groups and clients included not only the landed gentry such as the Earl of Dorset, a friend and patron, but such notables as Nell Gwyn and Isaac Newton.<sup>18</sup> The firm heavily invested in East India securities, underlining the close connections of the family with the politics and finance of the EIC.<sup>19</sup> In 1698 Francis Child was Lord Mayor of London and was elected to the EIC Court of Directors later in the same year.<sup>20</sup> In 1709 the old and the new EIC merger became a reality and the United Company was to be run by a Court of 24 annually elected Directors, each of whom was a major stockholder in the Company.<sup>21</sup>

Francis Child's jewellery business was also one of the largest in London.<sup>22</sup> In 1690 his stock of loose diamonds was valued at over £5,000, equivalent to at least £750,000 today.<sup>23</sup> The previous year he had been made an Alderman, was knighted by William III and became 'jeweller in ordinary' to the King.<sup>24</sup> Child was one of the largest importers of precious stones in London at a time when stockholders in the EIC could buy privately traded diamonds at half the rate of duty paid by other merchants. It may have been this business that first ignited his interest in the Company, as a source of precious stones.

Success in the diamond business depended on cross cultural cooperation and the building of personal and commercial connections and trust.<sup>25</sup> As a successful importer and warden of the Goldsmiths' Company, Sir Francis would have been familiar with these networks. Diamonds bought from EIC men, such as Captain Chamblett, captain of the ship *Samson* in 1670, would be polished and remounted for sale. His partner, John East (1613–88) had bought rough diamonds from an EIC Director John Joliffe (1613–80) and a number of Portuguese *Marrones* (new Christians) who had settled across Europe such as Isaac Alvares and Antonio Rodrigues Marques. Sir Francis continued to invest, often using Abraham Pluymer, a Dutch diamond cutter to do the buying, but later also using a Daniel Chardin in Madras.<sup>26</sup> Sir Dudley North (1641–91) is recorded as buying 2,000 pieces of eight from Sir Francis Child at 5s 4 ½d for export to Aleppo.<sup>27</sup> This international experience, allied to his standing in the City and his political clout, meant he was well placed to accompany the Earl of Pembroke, part of the English delegation negotiating the Treaty of Ryswick that ended the Nine Years War with France and Spain in 1697.

'A short account by way of Journal of 10th I observed most remarkable in my travels thro' some part of the Low Country, Flanders, & some part of Germany whilst on the Rhine' – a journal kept by Francis Child



during a momentous visit to the Netherlands in 1697, survives in the collection of the London Metropolitan Archives in two copies in bound notebooks.<sup>28</sup> This journal conveys how significantly Child's travel to the Netherlands shaped his aesthetic sensibilities, at a time when he was about to begin his substantial engagement with the EIC. Francis Child's impressions provide a vivid account of the décor and furnishings of grand mansions in the region and of the display of 'exotic' objects from the Americas and Asia. In Delft, Child made a special mention of the quality of porcelain manufactured in the town. His many visits to country mansions and palaces highlight his specialist interest in Asian objects and furnishings – painted screens, porcelain, and lacquerware to name only a few exotic commodities associated with the EIC. Child was keenly aware of decorative art from Asia, its status as a rarefied privilege, and the all-important channels of maritime trade that brought decorative objects from Asia into Europe. For example, in the King's house in the Bosc, he noted 'a curious closet made of the best sort of Indian Screens, the floor inlaid'.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, in Honselersdijk, south of The Hague, 'are closetts of choice pieces, especially one very large of Japan [lacquer], the ceiling of lookin glasse with flowers painted on it'.<sup>30</sup> The town of Middleburgh, 'a rich, populous and beautifull town, has many merchants which trade to all parts of the world, has a share in the East India Company and have during this war sent out many capers whereof some have carried 30 guns'.<sup>31</sup> He went on to detail the topographical qualities of Rotterdam that affected sea trade between England and the Netherlands.

Child's visit resulted in the purchase of over 60 paintings by great masters, at a cost of £4,850, a sum equivalent to millions today. He listed these paintings in the journal under the heading 'A catalogue of my pictures in my house in Lincoln Inn's Fields taken March 9, 1706 and of my drawings in frames with glass'. His son Robert purchased 42 Lincoln's Inn Fields (now the Royal College of Surgeons) in 1702, where Francis the Elder lived from 1704. Thus, this entry was made into the journal a few years later.<sup>32</sup> It is possible that the list was entered into the journal around the time of the Child family's relocation to Osterley Park after 1713.

Francis's son Robert (1674–1721) was the first of the family to live at Osterley. Knighted by King George I in April 1714, he continued and enhanced the family's global and political connections. Like his father he was the senior partner in the family bank and a diligent Director of the EIC, identified by Abel Boyer as one of the 'High Church' candidates standing at the elections for the East India Company.<sup>33</sup> During his time as Director the Spitalfields riots led to a ban on imported cotton textiles, the Treaty of Utrecht was signed and the Company had to help

the government pick up the financial pieces following the demise of the South Sea Company. But in Daniel Defoe's anonymously authored pamphlet, *The Secret History of the White Staff* (1714) Sir R Ch. is referenced as one of the 'jobbers and monied men' who had grown rich at the nation's expense.<sup>34</sup>

Not just a businessman, Sir Robert displayed a personal interest in connoisseurship and critical appreciation of art which can be ascertained at the very early stages of the acquisition of Osterley House. In the appendices of the list of paintings that documented the move from Lincoln's Inn Fields to Osterley, is Robert's portrait by the Swedish painter Michael Dahl (1656–1743), who had served as the figurative head of an exclusive debating society called the Society of the Virtuosi of St Luke (active c.1689–1743), also known as St Luke's Club or Vandyke's Club.<sup>35</sup> The Society's records show that in the first decade of its activities in the eighteenth century, Robert Child was one of an exclusive group of 20 members along with Christopher Wren the younger (1632–1723), the surgeon and anatomist William Cowper (1666–1709), and the painter Hugh Howard (1675–1737). This mixing of artists, art lovers and collectors formed an influential group of intellectuals who drove the discussions on taste and aesthetic judgment. These ideas and trends were likely consequential to the early stages of the design and furnishings for Osterley House.

Sir Robert died in 1721, and was succeeded by his brother Francis (1684–1740). Knighted on 28 September 1732, Francis Child II consolidated the family's status in the City, following his father as Alderman (from 1721–40), Sheriff of London (1722–3), and Lord Mayor (1731–2). He held senior positions in the influential Goldsmith's company. An MP from 1722, he represented the City of London for the first five years and served as an EIC Director over a 10-year period, attending EIC Court meetings regularly and the Company auctions every week. 1722 saw the establishment of the Company's Council of China, in recognition of the growth of trade with that empire. Under his Chairmanship the banking side of the business continued to thrive. Important advances were made to City dealers secured upon parcels of stock and heavy investments in East India securities.<sup>36</sup> A partner in the Bank, John Morse, left £10,000 each to Francis and Samuel Child in his will of 1736.<sup>37</sup> Child rented out most of the large property portfolio he had inherited, moved to live at Osterley and seems to have been responsible for major alterations there, probably including laying out the formal gardens. His estate passed to his youngest brother Samuel (1693–1752) in 1740.<sup>38</sup>

Sir Francis's youngest surviving son, Samuel was the only Child of his generation to marry. Although he did not follow the family tradition into the EIC Court he maintained an interest in the Company's affairs by joining a group of investors which owned and chartered the *Northampton* to the EIC. This ship was unfortunately lost in a violent storm in 1744 on its way back from China and India. He played a significant part in the making of Osterley Park as it remains today. He brought his family to live at Osterley, left them the wealth to continue to furnish the house with the finest things and introduced his sons into the society where they found their wives. Samuel Child took on responsibility as head of the family banking firm in 1740, having been a partner for a number of years. He held substantial EIC stock, and in his will left his wife £45,000 in Company stock and £3,000 of the same to his son Francis (1735–63).<sup>39</sup>

His two sons, Francis III (1735–63) and Robert (1739–82), inherited the Child family fortune. Both were educated at Oxford, and were partners in Child & Co., and were responsible for transforming Osterley into the house it is today. On 31 December 1760 Francis III held nearly £33,000 worth of East India stock.<sup>40</sup> He left his fiancée £50,000 when he died in 1763, days before his impending marriage. The bulk of his estate went to his brother Robert, though he does not seem to have passed on his interest in the ship *Osterley*, which was also chartered to the EIC.

Robert married Sarah Jodrell (1741–93) of Ankerwyke in Buckinghamshire in 1763. She brought more EIC associations to Osterley. Robert and Sarah are credited with working with Robert Adam to change Osterley House into the neoclassical house it is still today. Robert Child died 28 July 1782, aged 43. The Jodrell family had longstanding links to the Company. Both her grandparents had an EIC heritage: Richard Craddock had been an EIC factor in India and Persia in the seventeenth century and Daniel Sheldon was a factor in India. In 1659, Sheldon wrote to another factor for the company at Bandel, urgently requesting a sample of tea to send home to his uncle Dr Gilbert Sheldon, Archbishop of Canterbury: 'for God's sake, good or badd, buy the chaw if it is to be sold. Pray favour me likewise with advise what 'tis good for, and how it is to be used'.<sup>41</sup> It seems, however, that Child's interest in the EIC, which had always been commercial, passed to those partners who had an active role in running the bank. Thomas Devon, a partner in 1752, was a significant supporter and backer of Laurence Sullivan (1713–86) in the highly charged fight between him and Robert Clive (1725–74), the first Governor of India, over control of the Company.<sup>42</sup>

# Winds of trade

In the second half of the eighteenth century, there were three Company ships called *Osterley*, each of which bore a connection with the Child family (see Table 4.2). The ships in which the Child family invested are representative of the larger networks of Company trade in Asia at this time. They carried the goods that met the demand of the burgeoning consumer market at home. All of the Child family who served as Directors also served on the Committees that commissioned them. They were well placed to understand and benefit from this trade, not least from the private trade, a form of regulated corruption whereby East India Company's Committees placed bulk orders with the ships' captains and supercargoes.

Sanctioned through indulgences in Company policy, ship's captains could earn up to 10 times their actual salary by taking on such commissions. The most popular privately traded commodities from India and China were porcelain, lacquerware, silk and cotton textiles, and ivory. The lacquer furniture and armorial porcelain on display at *Osterley* would almost certainly have resulted from special commissions.

Table 4.2: *Osterley* Ships

Osterley I <sup>43</sup>	Osterley II	Osterley III
Investor/owner: Francis Child III	Principal Managing Owner: William Dent,	Launched 1780
Launched 1758	Brother of Robert Dent, a partner at	Principal Managing
Principal Managing	Childs Bank.	Owners: William Dent,
Owner: Charles Raymond	Launched 1771	Robert Dent and (later) John Atkins
Voyages:	Voyages:	Voyages:
1) 1757/8 China	1) 1771/2 Benkulen	1) 1780/81 Bombay
2) 1760/1 Benkulen,	and China	and China
Madras and Bengal	2) 1774/5 St Helena	2) 1784/5 Madras
3) 1765/6 Bombay	and Benkulen	and China
and China	3) 1777/8 Madras and	3) 1786/7 Madras
4) 1768/9 Madras and	Bengal	and China
China		4) 1789/90 Bombay
		and China
		5) 1792/3 China
		6) 1794/5 China
		7) 1797/8 Madras and
		Bengal

Examining in detail a sample journey of the *Osterley I* when Francis Child III was an investor illustrates the commodities traded on it, and the challenges encountered. *Osterley I*'s final voyage from Madras to China provides a good example of the Company's dealings in Asia. Harbour logs from Captain Francis Fortescue's journal for the voyage indicate that like most East Indiamen, it sailed along with other companion ships (the *Pigott*, *Thames*, *Ankerwick*, *Lincoln*, *Triton*, *Nottingham*, *Havannah*, *Hector*, and *Ashburnham*) as well as country vessels (ships that sailed Asian but not European waters). *Osterley I* sailed for Madras on 31 January 1769. In June, while on its journey from the Goan port of Cabo de Rama (Cape Rama) in northwest India to Cape Comorin in the southernmost tip of India, the ship picked up an important consignment of elephant bone (ivory). On 12 July 1769 while docked close to Madras, the ship received redwood and cotton on behalf of the Company. These goods were usually brought to the main ship on smaller country ships, which did the rounds from ports and factories. The ship then sailed towards Bengal and stowed additional loads of 500 bales of cotton and 30 tons of redwood. It was only in October that the ship reached Whampoa, after passing through the Malacca Straits. Once near Canton, much of the cotton and redwood and the ship's cargo of lead were unloaded and the ship 'received on board 90 chests of china of the Hon'ble comps [Honorable Company's], and 62 Private trade'.<sup>44</sup> This suggests that Fortescue was acting on behalf of several private clients, one of whom may have been Robert Child II, under whom many restorations and refurbishments occurred at Osterley Park. *Osterley*'s journey back in January 1770 was its last, as in its next incarnation the ship changed owners.

The EIC ships *Osterley II* & *Osterley III* retained a connection with the Child family through indirect means. Robert Dent, a partner in Child & Co. from 1763, was a member of the charter party on a number of his brother William Dent's ships including *Osterley II* and *Osterley III*. Both ships made regular voyages to India and China. But these ships, like others, also played an important part supporting the expansionist ambitions of the Company through serving in battles. Towards the end of its third voyage, *Osterley II* was captured by the French following an attack by two frigates *Purvoyeuse* and *Elizabeth* in February 1779.<sup>45</sup> A similar fate befell *Osterley III*, which had one of the longest runs out of the three ships. After many successful voyages to India and China, *Osterley III* was embroiled in the rising Anglo-French rivalry at the end of the eighteenth century, while towards the end of its seventh run, *Osterley III* was captured by the French ship *La Forte* (on 13 February 1799) but later rescued.<sup>46</sup>

## The 'oriental' interiors at Osterley

The presentation of the surviving interiors of Osterley House privileges its neoclassical ethos, honed under Robert Adam.<sup>47</sup> Within this explicit neoclassical programme are embedded 'oriental' objects that were sourced through EIC maritime trade in material and luxury goods. The display of objects that travelled on the Company's ships alongside the fashionable neoclassical interiors created by Robert Adam raises an important conceptual question about their place in the narrative of neoclassical design (see Figure 4.2). Would this juxtaposition have created a perception of incongruity of style and décor in the eighteenth century? Given the burgeoning globalization of the period, especially in the way precious goods were valued for their place associations as well as their artistic merit, it is worth re-thinking how these seemingly out of place objects became an important



**Figure 4.2** Ceramic Parade Jar, c.1700–1770, Osterley House. Image courtesy of Stuart Howat.

part of the emotional economy of global maritime trade. In this section, we examine examples of 'oriental' goods that were made, circulated and acquired for the personal pleasure of the Child family.

A decorative art in Japan, Korea and China, lacquerware held a particular exotic appeal for its European collectors as a luxury craft especially popular for its polished finish and vibrant lustre. The process of lacquering in itself was labour-intensive – successive coats of lacquer could at times be built up into a pile of over 100 layers.<sup>48</sup> A large private trade of lacquered goods flourished in the eighteenth century, and lacquered furniture became an especially popular import into English country houses as the Chinese imperial court relaxed its trade barrier in 1672. The armorial lacquer furniture at Osterley House includes a brilliantly finished wooden lacquer chest, wooden hall chairs, and a stunning eight-part folding screen made of leather, brass, and wood. The lacquer collections at Osterley highlight the popularity of a particularly delicate technique of gold engraving on lacquer, a Chinese variant of the Japanese style that combined gold and silver inlay with surface painting on lacquer.

Company records show that in 1730, the period in which Francis Child II was deeply involved in the EIC, an order for two large lacquered screens was completed.<sup>49</sup> There is every possibility that Francis the younger had knowledge of this commission, which would have made for a memorable addition to the courtroom. It is possible that the screens' arrival spurred the private commission of a large eight-panelled lacquer screen completed with the Child family coat-of-arms. The screen features a landscape scene with a palace complex fronting an enclosed landscaped garden with its rivulets, bridges, and fenced gardens. The scene is populated with figures shown engaging in their daily activities. The bottom section is complemented with a floral design enclosed within a rectangular cartouche; the decoration is picked up in gold, silver, and red and both the design and technique pay homage to the Japanese aesthetics. Other notable lacquer objects include a rectangular dome top beech-wood coffer, sourced in India and traded in Canton, with brass fixtures finished in black lacquer bearing the Child family crest on its front panel that was brought into Osterley in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. The utilitarian design of the coffer and the minimalist geometric diamond decorative border in gold suggest its use as a travelling sea chest. Such coffers would have been ideal containers to store personal items or to pack specialist buys of armorial porcelain and tea acquired on behalf of the Child family in Canton (see Figure 4.3).





**Figure 4.3** Chinese lacquer chest, Osterley House. Image courtesy of Stuart Howat.

The lacquerware furnishings sourced from China are in contrast to the planned placement of the lacquer secretaire (c.1773) and commode in the now-famous Etruscan Dressing Room (1775), the ante-chamber in the State Apartment at Osterley Park (see Figure 4.4). Adam's designs for this room were inspired by his four-year study tour of Europe in 1754–8. The discoveries at Pompeii and Herculaneum inspired the decoration of the Etruscan Room at Osterley Park, demonstrating how past values could influence the present. The most complete remaining example of Adam's Etruscan interiors, the designs on all four walls are believed to be painted by Pietro Maria Borgnis (1739–1810) and were repeated on both doors, the ceiling and a set of eight chairs. The visually contiguous design of the Etruscan Room, the hallmark of the integrated style championed by Adam and emulated in interior design for decades afterwards, was considered experimental for its time. The intellectual impact of Adam's mentor Piranesi on his work is well documented, and the Etruscan Room's sensibility owes much to the engraved wall scheme published in Piranesi's book of chimney-piece and furniture designs, *Diverse maniere d'adornare I cammini ...* (1769), which was much used by Adam and his contemporaries.<sup>50</sup>

The lacquerware placed within the room would have provided a distinct counterpoint to the 'relentless patterning' effect of the neoclassical



interior of the room,<sup>51</sup> where the ‘chair rails are both the same dimensions and painted as the same manner as the room’s dado’ in essence ‘doubling the painted surface [that] blurs and confuses the chair’s relation to the wall’.<sup>52</sup> Thomas Chippendale’s (1718–79) *The Gentleman and Cabinet Maker’s Director* ... (1756) made clear that English designers were happy to mix Chinese-influenced styles with Gothic, Palladian and French. This is evident in the Osterley secretaire attributed to Chippendale that incorporates panels of Chinese lacquer as well as English ‘japanning,’ the common term for the Western imitation of the lacquer technique. However,



**Figure 4.4** Chinese lacquer secretaire, Osterley House. Image courtesy of Stuart Howat.

it has been pointed out that the core style of the commode and the secretaire remained distinctly French in character while echoing the overall design of the Etruscan Room through the use of *paterae* and *guilloche* motifs on the furniture.<sup>53</sup>

An investigation into the commission of the lacquerware featuring Chinese craftsmanship and Robert Adam's oeuvre lies outside the scope of this chapter. However, the co-existence of 'oriental', Chinese lacquer screens in a French design, alongside 'neoclassical' furnishings raises the possibility that Adam's original design plan for the Etruscan Room included the addition of lacquered furniture. It is equally likely that Chippendale's designs at Osterley were bespoke commissions inspired by the armorial lacquerware sourced by older generations of the Child family. The lacquerware would have served as an appropriate reference to the legacy of the family's connections with the EIC and global trade networks. For an eighteenth-century audience, embedding objects seen to belong to the exotic East – the source of precious spices, diamonds, fine porcelain – within the calm grandeur of this room, would have decidedly challenged notions of the familiar.

The rapid expansion of the English market for porcelain from about 1720 to 1770 saw nearly 25–35 million pieces of porcelain entering the country making it one of the largest importers in Europe. East India Company officials, ship captains and supercargoes discovered that there was a market in England for unusual, large or colourful porcelain such as the ceramic parade jars commissioned to sit alongside the fashionable neoclassical interior being created at Osterley Park by Robert Adam. Fired to perfection in the kilns of Jingdezhen, in south China, porcelain objects travelled nearly 500 miles south to the port town of Guangzhou (Canton) where they were sold in shops and warehouses managed by Chinese merchants who, as members of a guild, or co-hong, regulated the terms of their trade.<sup>54</sup>

The decorative appeal of personalized bespoke tea sets, dinner services and other tableware led to armorial porcelain becoming a central marker of taste and dynastic prestige.<sup>55</sup> Among the earliest armorial services for the English market is the stellar service at Osterley, made for a member of the Child family. The Child crest repeated on the rim depicts an eagle holding an adder in its beak. Their coat-of-arms in the centre was granted in 1700 to Sir Francis Child, the Elder. On the basis of style, it has been suggested that the service was ordered by Francis the elder's son and EIC Chairman Sir Robert Child, since his brother Francis Child the younger only succeeded him in 1721.<sup>56</sup>



**Figure 4.5** Child family armorial porcelain plate, c.1700–1725, Osterley House. Image courtesy of Stuart Howat.

Figure 4.5 depicts the armorial service ordered between 1700 and 1725. It is the only known example decorated with a ‘powder blue’ ground associated with luxury ornamental wares. The powdered cobalt, suspended in water, was blown through a bamboo tube with a gauze cloth at the end onto unglazed porcelain. This evenly distributed the ground colour. White panels designed to be painted with coloured enamels after a glaze firing, were protected from the sprayed cobalt with paper panels. The porcelain was then glazed and fired. It was then painted with translucent enamels over the glaze, in primarily red and green, known as the ‘famille-verte’ or green family palette.<sup>57</sup>

The textiles at Osterley encompass complex creative processes that were shaped through networks of Company trade in Asia. They highlight the central role of EIC sea trade in creating a global economy of artistic exchange that shaped the domestic interior in England. During Francis Child the Elder’s tenure as EIC committee member and later as a Director, the Company was responsible for augmenting the trade in cotton textiles from India, with calicos accounting for nearly three-quarters of Company trade. The enhanced supply of cotton fabrics and prints into Britain not only upset social hierarchies of elite and everyday use of printed fabrics,

but also posed a threat to the livelihoods of wool and silk weavers.<sup>58</sup> In 1721, imported cotton textiles of every description from India, whether pure cotton or mixed composition, were banned and restrictions were placed on the sale of most cotton textiles through what were known as the Calico Acts (1690–1721), and this prohibition was not lifted until the 1770s.<sup>59</sup> However, the prohibition was not so successful in curbing the demand for cotton prints and fabrics, the supply of which was picked up by the English EIC.<sup>60</sup> Some of the best Indian embroideries to enter Osterley date from the period of turmoil and prohibition.

At Osterley, the opulent silk embroidered bed pelmet cover and canopy in Mrs Child's bedchamber was likely bought at Surat around 1700–30, during the height of the popularity of Cambay embroideries in Europe (see Figure 4.6). The textile features a plain cream background, which is contrasted with brightly embroidered patterns of thin branches and leaves in a dark green colour and red and yellow flowers. It is now understood that these embroideries were created by the artisans of the Mochi (cobbler) caste of Gujarat who originally worked the delicate chain-stitch hook and needlework on leather and later adapted this technique on to cloth.<sup>61</sup> The weaving process itself was quite seasonal with the best weaving done during the rains since the moist air was less brittle for the threads. Thus most agreements and orders were usually placed before the monsoons set in and the raw cloth dyed and cured in the autumn sun.<sup>62</sup> The Mughal court also actively patronized embroidered textiles, but after the rise of European trade in the subcontinent their designs were adapted to suit the demands of Company trade. By the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the monopoly of the English EIC in Gujarat had significantly declined, though it retained the factory in the port town of Surat on the western coast of Gujarat.



**Figure 4.6** Detail of Mrs Child's silk bed canopy, Osterley House. Image courtesy of Stuart Howat.

China too was the primary exporter of silk to the EIC in the eighteenth century, supplying both raw silk for English weavers as well as bulk silk textiles for retailers with the finer pieces reserved for private trade. Popular designs on silks included a combination of painted patterns and embroidered motifs of flowers, leaves, birds and animals which were part of the craze for a decorative style broadly known as 'china-worke' or chinoiserie in Europe. This 'oriental' style could be copied in India or China from European pattern books brought through sea trade.<sup>63</sup>

The Canton Factory records for the year 1732 give a particularly vivid account of the commission of painted silks by EIC supercargoes: 'We gave each merchant [at Canton] a particular charge that their skills be made of the best Nankeen silk, that the flowered silks be all new patterns & collours as near as possible to the patterns we delivered them, that the taffaties & gorgorons have a good gloss on them'.<sup>64</sup> In the backdrop of political warring and unrest between the Company and the Mughal ruler Shah Alam II (r. 1759–1806) the EIC experienced a decline in silver that consequently weakened their power to purchase raw silk. In December 1760, it was ordered that the Committee of Treasury be desired to ship five chests of foreign silver for China to the ship *Osterley* (and other similar ships) for Bencoolan.<sup>65</sup> The impact of the trade impasse is addressed in a letter to Thomas Hodges Esq., Governor of the Council of Bombay. Captain Payne reported that they:

are sorry to find that you Gentlemen are much in the same situation as those at Madras and Bengal but as Peace is restored we hope that Trade will flourish. Our being disappointed of silver from Bengal and Madras has obliged us to fill our sixteen ships with China ware and tea and not an ounce of Raw silk, which we find bears a good price in Europe.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, Company trade in India and China was closely connected and political fluctuations at either end impacted the nature of commodities that could be shipped back to Europe.

## Conclusion

They brew very good beer, but are peticularly famous for their Porcellane or earthen ware, which they paint better than the Chinese, make more large, and as beautifull everyway, could they

but make their small ware transparent in which the Chinese have the advantage of them.<sup>67</sup>

This record of Delft earthenware recorded in Francis Child the Elder's diary evokes the growing fervour for objects from the East in Europe in the backdrop of the ever-widening channels of global maritime trade. Francis Child's observation about the unique transparency of Chinese porcelain compared to Delft earthenware was astute. Tin-glazed pottery had been produced in Holland since the first quarter of the sixteenth century, and Delft had emerged as one of the main centres for its production in the seventeenth century. With the rise in imports of Chinese porcelain by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) after 1602, the fashion for blue and white porcelain put traditional Delft ceramic wares into competition with their exotic counterparts. As a result, from the first quarter of the seventeenth century, Delft potters had begun to imitate the transparent finish of Chinese blue and white porcelain ware by using Chinese style decorations in cobalt blue over a white-tin glazed background.<sup>68</sup>

The fashion for objects in the manner of Chinese blue and white porcelain rose to epic proportions in the decades to follow, a prime example of the re-casting of oriental designs and objects as exotic goods in the European marketplace. Yet, for the Child family who were at the very forefront of East India Company operations, the 'orient' was familiar ground, and its objects well within reach. Their ability to imprint their own identity on these luxury goods through bespoke commissions of armorials meant that they could have access not only to objects but also to the narratives that shaped them. The continued pre-eminence of these 'oriental' luxuries alongside and often embedded within the neoclassical interior of Osterley speaks to the Child family's desire to foster a global identity.

